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# Self Acceptance Among Young Adults Who Know They Were Born From A Married By Accident

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**Abstract.** This research seeks to thoroughly investigate the process of self-acceptance in young adults who recognize that their birth resulted from a marriage stemming from an unintended pregnancy (married by accident/MBA). Using a qualitative approach within a phenomenological framework, information was collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted with five early-adult participants and analyzed thematically. The results uncovered four main themes: the path of self-acceptance and reinterpreting life's importance; the interaction of family relationships and emotional distance; social validation and the importance of acceptance; and self-regulation and gaining insights from life experiences. The findings indicate that self-acceptance evolves in a non-linear manner, initially characterized by rejection and identity confusion, eventually transforming into a more adaptive understanding of meaning over time. The lack of open communication regarding birth origins in the family contributes to emotional disconnection, while support from friends, close companions, and partners acts as a vital source of validation outside the family. This study improves understanding of the psychological intricacies of individuals with complicated birth backgrounds, while also laying the groundwork for developing counselling techniques that are better suited to this group.

Keywords: *Self-love, Unplanned Married, Early Adulthood*

# 1. Introduction

The occurrence of "married by accident" (MBA) marriages, resulting from an unexpected pregnancy, continues to be common in Indonesia, particularly among adolescents and young adults. These marriages are typically hurried to conceal the family's disgrace while also ensuring a definite legal status for the forthcoming child (Nurhandayani, 2022). In Indonesian society, which still strongly adheres to religious and traditional norms, marriages resulting from premarital pregnancy are often viewed negatively by the surrounding community.

Most studies on MBA in Indonesia to date have focused on the pregnant individuals themselves or married couples, for example, regarding readiness for marriage, coping strategies, or the stigma they face (Sasmita & Herdi, 2022; Sari & Desiningrum, 2017). Other studies have also highlighted the psychological impact of such marriages, namely the emotional instability often experienced by couples in a marriage resulting from pregnancy, as they must immediately assume new parental roles without adequate preparation (Fathur, 2023). Nevertheless, the psychological effects of this scenario extend beyond the married couple. Kids who eventually understand that they came from a "hasty" marriage might face psychological burdens like shame, guilt, or a sense of inadequacy. Such social stigma can obstruct self-acceptance, provoke inner turmoil, and influence a person's capacity to establish healthy relationships with others.

This issue becomes more complex when individuals enter early adulthood (ages 20–29). Hurlock (2007) notes that by this stage, a person should ideally have a stable identity and be able to accept themselves fully. However, when a person only later realizes that their birth resulted from an unplanned pregnancy, the process of self-acceptance becomes more difficult because they must confront social judgment, a negative self-image, and the conflict between the “expected self” and the “actual self.” Rogers (1961) asserts that complete self-acceptance leads an individual to a state *of congruence* that is, harmony between self-worth, self-image, and the *ideal self*.

To date, research on self-acceptance has largely focused on adolescents who experience premarital pregnancy or undergo an MBA directly (Putri, 2010), while the experiences of children born from such marriages who only become aware of the circumstances of their birth in adulthood have not been specifically studied. In fact, according to a UNFPA report (2022), nearly half of all pregnancies worldwide approximately 121 million pregnancies per year are unplanned, indicating that phenomena such as out-of-wedlock births have the potential to affect children’s psychosocial well-being on a significant scale. It is this research gap that underlies the choice of a qualitative phenomenological approach in this study, to explore in depth the subjective experiences of young adults as they construct their identities and come to terms with their past.

# 2. Method

## Research Design

This study employs a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design to explore the subjective experiences of young adults in the process of self-acceptance after realizing that they were born from an unplanned marriage. A phenomenological design was chosen because it focuses on how individuals directly interpret a phenomenon they

experience, making it considered the most appropriate for uncovering complex and personal inner dynamics such as self-acceptance (Creswell & Poth, 2023).

### Participants

The research participants consisted of five early adults selected using *purposive selection*, based on the following criteria: (1) being in the early adulthood developmental phase; (2) being aware that they were born from an unplanned pregnancy; and (3) being willing to participate voluntarily. This technique was used to ensure that the participants involved had firsthand experience with the phenomenon under study, so that the data obtained would be relevant to the research objectives (Creswell & Poth, 2023). The participants' identities were disguised using initials (MBR, SQI, RJFD, BA, and NA) to protect their privacy.

### Data Collection

Data were collected through in-depth interviews using a semi-structured approach to explore the participants' emotional experiences, family dynamics, and processes of self-acceptance. The semi-structured approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore participants' responses more flexibly, without losing sight of the core research topic. Interviews were conducted in person or online, depending on each participant's circumstances and comfort level.

### Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the six-step process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2021): familiarization with the data through interview transcriptions; *initial coding*; identifying categories from the codes generated; reviewing themes; defining and naming themes; and compiling a final thematic report reflecting the participants' experiences of self-acceptance. The analysis process was conducted iteratively until data saturation was reached that is, the point at which no further meaningful information or new themes could be identified from the data obtained.

## 3. Results

### Overview of Findings

Data analysis yielded 19 categories grouped into four main themes that reflect the dynamics of self-acceptance among young adults who know they were born via MBA, namely: (1) The Process of Self-Acceptance and Reconstruction of Life's Meaning; (2) The Dynamics of Family Relationships and Emotional Distance; (3) Social Support and the Meaning of Belonging; and (4) Self-Regulation, Life Learning, and Future Orientation. Table 1 shows the frequency distribution of each category based on the results of data coding for the five participants (MBR, SQI, RJFD, BA, and NA).

**Table 1**

*Frequency Distribution of Categories by Participant*

| No | Category | MBR | SQI | RJFD | BA | NA | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **The Process of Self-Acceptance and Reconstruction of the Meaning of Life** | | | | | | | |
| 1 | Self-acceptance and the situation | 3 | 4 | 9 | 4 | 3 | 23 |
| 2 | Acceptance of family and circumstances | 1 | 1 | 4 | 9 | 0 | 15 |
| 3 | Acceptance of Fate and Life | 2 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 8 |
| 4 | The Path to Emotional Peace | 1 | 5 | 6 | 1 | 4 | 17 |
| 10 | Emotional shift from negative to positive | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 6 |
| 11 | Development of Emotional Maturity | 5 | 4 | 6 | 1 | 4 | 20 |
| **The Dynamics of Family Relationships and Emotional Distance** | | | | | | | |
| 5 | Emotional Distance from Family | 0 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 6 |
| 6 | Caution in Dealing with Parents | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 3 |
| 7 | Dynamics of the Relationship with the Mother and Family | 0 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 11 |
| 8 | Changes in Relationships and Communication with Parents | 2 | 0 | 5 | 1 | 4 | 12 |
| 18 | Questions about honesty and unequal treatment | 4 | 1 | 1 | 5 | 2 | 13 |
| 19 | Concerns about marriage and relationships with parents | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 6 |
| **Social Support and Sense of Belonging** | | | | | | | |
| 9 | Small gestures of care in meaningful social relationships | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 14 | The Importance of Social Support and Attention from Friends, Close Friends, and Partners | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 4 |
| 15 | The Value of Being Accompanied and Accepted Unconditionally | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 4 | 5 |
| 16 | Small but meaningful gestures in social relationships | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| **Self-Regulation, Life Learning, and Future Orientation** | | | | | | | |
| 12 | Improving Self-Control in Social Relationships | 3 | 5 | 14 | 0 | 1 | 23 |
| 13 | Lessons from personal and family experiences | 2 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 9 |
| 17 | Concerns about the future and family | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |

Table 1 shows that the categories “self-acceptance and situational acceptance” and “increased self-control in social relationships” were the most dominant (23 occurrences each), followed by “development of emotional maturity” (20 occurrences). In contrast, the categories within the themes of Social Support and Sense of Belonging appeared with much lower frequency, indicating that experiences of meaningful social support were relatively rarely expressed compared to intrapsychic experiences and family relationships.

## Thematic Description

Table 2 presents a narrative description of the four major themes along with the categories that comprise them.

**Table 2.**

*Thematic Description of Research Findings*

| Theme | Description of Research Findings |
|---|---|
| The Process of Self-Acceptance and Reconstructing the Meaning of Life | Describes how participants experience the process of self-acceptance regarding their personal circumstances, family, and life's destiny. Participants describe an initial phase characterized by denial, confusion, and questions about their family origins, which later evolves into a new understanding of their life experiences. |
| Dynamics of Family Relationships and Emotional Distance | Shows how family background and parental communication patterns influence participants' emotional relationships. Family relationships are described as generally functional and characterized by minimal emotional expression, leading participants to be more cautious in their communication. |
| Social Support and a Sense of Belonging | Describes the role of social support from friends, close friends, and partners in helping participants feel unconditionally accepted, even though the forms of attention they receive are relatively simple. |
| Self-Regulation, Life Learning, and Future Orientation | Describes participants' adaptive strategies, such as increased self-control in social relationships and learning from family experiences to make wiser life decisions in the future. |

Regarding the theme of Self-Acceptance and the Rebuilding of Life's Meaning, participants initially faced challenges in self-acceptance before ultimately creating a new purpose. Subject 1 stated, "The hardest struggle is accepting my true self," a dilemma that ultimately evolved into the realization that "every experience has fortified me and prepared me to face the future." Certain people experienced suicidal thoughts during their childhood or adolescence, but ultimately discovered reasons to continue and developed ways to soothe their emotions.

Regarding "Dynamics of Family Relationships and Emotional Distance," participants characterized relationships as primarily functional with a deficiency in emotional intimacy. Subject 3 mentioned, "I don't have a strong relationship with my parents. They're occupied with work from dawn until dusk," whereas Subject 4 revealed emotional conflict due to the family's unwillingness to share: "Why do I receive different treatment? Why must I deceive? "Why weren't they simply truthful from the beginning?"

Focusing on Social Support and the Importance of Acceptance, participants highlighted that the acceptance and presence of their nearest ones, even in small gestures, hold significant value. Subject 4 mentioned, "Support is straightforward: having company, being invited for meals, and receiving acknowledgment," while Subject 5 confirmed, "Help from friends and my partner is extremely beneficial."

Within the context of Self-Regulation, Life Lessons, and Future Outlook, attendees exhibited enhanced self-discipline and prudence in interpersonal connections due to

insights gained from familial encounters. Subject 1 expressed, “I realized that I shouldn't fear failure,” whereas Subject 3 noted, “I have become more cautious and discerning regarding my social circles.”

## 4. Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that self-acceptance in participants who acknowledged being born from a “married by accident” (MBA) situation develops in a nonlinear manner and includes four interrelated psychological dynamics: the conflict for self-acceptance, emotional disengagement in familial relationships, the need for social support, and the improvement of self-regulation arising from life experiences. During the first phase, nearly all participants experienced rejection and uncertainty about their identity, as noted by Subject 1: “The hardest part is accepting who I am,” before eventually moving to the realization that this journey “increased my resilience.” These findings indicate that self-acceptance among individuals with MBA parents is not a one-time achievement but a continuous journey that requires an ongoing dialogue between perceived identity and the unchangeable reality of one's origins. This concept corresponds with Rogers’ (1961) view that self-acceptance requires individuals to integrate all their life experiences, even the difficult ones, into a cohesive self-image, until balance is reached between the ideal self and the actual self. In contrast to the research by Sasmita and Herdi (2022), which revealed analogous denial patterns in individuals undergoing an MBA, these results broaden that view to include a different group involved in the MBA experience, specifically the child resulting from that union, who nonetheless demonstrates a comparable psychological path. This pattern likely stems from a conflict between socio-religious standards that shame premarital pregnancy and the person's fundamental need for self-esteem and a complete identity; thus, the acceptance of their birth reality demands considerable time and mental effort.

This journey of self-acceptance is also intimately linked to the nature of the participants' family dynamics, often described as generally functional but lacking in openness. Subject 3 stated, “I don’t feel much connection with my parents,” while Subject 4 highlighted the tension from their family's concealed secrets: “Why lie? "Why not just be honest from the start?" These findings suggest that concealing details regarding birth origins not only maintains the confidentiality of a specific fact but also affects the family's communication approach, rendering it more detached. This is consistent with Bowlby’s attachment theory (1988) and the explanation by Mikulincer, Shaver, and Pereg (2021) that insecure attachment is linked to defensive emotional regulation tactics, like maintaining emotional distance for self-defense. This trend matches the results of Berger and Paul (2008) concerning families created with donor assistance, indicating that parents' reluctance to discuss certain subjects negatively impacts overall family dynamics. It aligns with the findings of Camilleri and Sammut Scerri (2025), which suggested that childhood secrets in families result in disjointed relationship patterns that persist into adulthood. This emotional detachment probably stems from parents' worries about societal criticism if the reality is revealed, leading them to avoid the topic, which indirectly widens the psychological divide with their children.

In the context of limited family openness, external social support became a crucial protective factor for the participants, even when it manifested in basic ways. Subject 4 mentioned, “Support is straightforward: having company, being asked to join for meals, and receiving recognition,” while Subject 5 highlighted, “Assistance from friends and a significant other is extremely beneficial.” These results indicate that when family

emotional support is inadequate, individuals often seek out other important people beyond the family to meet their desire for validation and acceptance. This corresponds with Taylor's (2021) examination of social support as a psychological shield, alongside the results from Satici, Uysal, and Deniz (2020) indicating that social connectedness correlates with diminished feelings of loneliness in those facing emotional estrangement from their families. Unlike the study by Sari and Desiningrum (2017) on women in MBA programs that found spousal support vital for post-marital adjustment, this research reveals a similar pattern in the subsequent generation: external assistance beyond the nuclear family remains the primary protective factor, even with differing contextual situations. The relatively infrequent occurrence of social support as a theme in this study's data, unlike other themes, likely does not indicate that social support is unimportant; rather, it implies that participants tended to be selective and reluctant to disclose, leading to fewer examples of substantial support in comparison to experiences of self-management.

In the end, all the dynamics detailed above—such as the challenge of self-acceptance, emotional detachment from family, and the necessity for social support—contributed to the participants' growth in mature self-regulation and future-oriented thinking. Participant 1 mentioned, "I've realized I shouldn't fear failure," whereas Participant 3 remarked, "I've grown more careful and discerning in my social engagements." These results indicate that challenging life events not only lead to psychological trauma but also promote the growth of adaptive abilities, including practical caution and a more developed outlook on the future. This pattern can be explained through Ungar's (2021) multisystemic resilience perspective, which emphasizes that psychological resilience is shaped by an individual's ability to adaptively negotiate resources from their social environment, as well as through the review by Compas et al. (2021) indicating that active *coping* strategies are associated with healthier psychological outcomes compared to avoidance. These findings both reinforce and expand upon the results of Fathur's (2023) study on emotional instability among couples pursuing an MBA; this study indicates that, in the next generation, similar initial impacts may ultimately transform into a more mature capacity for self-regulation. The emergence of this pattern is likely the result of a long- -term psychological adaptation process, in which individuals repeatedly faced with challenging family situations gradually develop more mature defense mechanisms.

Overall, this study contributes by filling a gap in the literature on self-acceptance among a group that has received little attention in Indonesian MBA literature: children born from such marriages who only realize in adulthood that their background differs from that of the majority. This contrasts with most previous studies, which focused directly on couples or adolescents experiencing premarital pregnancy (Sasmita & Herdi, 2022; Sari & Desiningrum, 2017; Fathur, 2023). This study also reveals similarities in psychological patterns with other populations experiencing family secrecy regarding their birth origins, such as children conceived through donor assistance (Berger & Paul, 2008), thereby opening opportunities for the application of a broader theoretical framework in understanding the MBA phenomenon within the Indonesian cultural context. Consequently, psychological interventions for this group should be designed as a phased support process that allows clients to reframe their experiences, encourages supportive and open family communication, expands access to peer support outside the family, and strengthens their capacity for self-regulation a capacity that has already begun to develop naturally within them.

Nevertheless, this study has a number of limitations. As is characteristic of qualitative phenomenological research, the findings reflect the depth and specificity of the five participants' lived experiences rather than statistical generalizability; the aim was to achieve an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon rather than to produce findings representative of the broader population of young adults born to MBA parents. Transferability of these findings to other contexts should therefore be assessed by the reader in relation to the similarity of those contexts. Participants were also recruited through purposive selection based on the criterion of voluntary participation, which could potentially introduce selection bias, as the individuals willing to be interviewed are likely those who are already relatively better able to process their experiences. Furthermore, data were collected through retrospective interviews, so the participants' reconstructions of past experiences may have been influenced by the process of meaning-making that has occurred over time. Future research is recommended to involve a larger number of participants with diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, consider a longitudinal design to capture the dynamics of changes in self-acceptance over time, and explore parents' perspectives on the decision to disclose or conceal their child's birth background.

## 5. Conclusion

This study aims to explore in depth the process of self-acceptance among young adults who realize they were born as a result of *a "married by accident*" (MBA) situation, particularly in terms of emotional dynamics, family relationships, social support, and the coping strategies that develop throughout their lives. The findings indicate that self-acceptance among participants is neither a linear process nor a final destination reached all at once, but rather a recurring and layered psychological journey. In the early stages, participants generally experience rejection, identity confusion, and inner conflict resulting from the clash between social norms that stigmatize their birth background and their basic need to feel valued and whole as individuals. Over time, participants developed new meanings for their life experiences, gradually reducing their tendency to blame themselves or their parents, until they achieved a more stable emotional peace.

The research showed that family communication styles that hide birth origins lead to emotional distance between participants and their parents, causing participants to adopt a wary outlook and establish emotional boundaries for self-defense. On the other hand, support from friends, close allies, and partners, even in the simplest forms, has proven to be crucial as a source of affirmation and acceptance not consistently provided by immediate family. The combination of challenging family circumstances and available social support encouraged participants to develop better self-regulation and emotional control, as well as a more perceptive approach to managing relationships and planning for the future.

Overall, this study contributes to a better understanding of self-acceptance among individuals with complex birth backgrounds, while also filling a research gap regarding a group that has thus far received little attention in the MBA literature in Indonesia. It is hoped that these findings will serve as a foundation for the development of psychological interventions that are more sensitive to the experiences of individuals born under MBA circumstances whether in the form of counselling that provides space for a gradual process of reframing, education for families on the importance of open communication,

or strengthening access to social and peer support as part of efforts to build long-term psychological resilience.


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## Data Availability:

Interview data is confidential as it contains participants' personal and sensitive information. Data may be accessed on a limited basis for academic purposes with the researcher's permission and ethical approval.

## Authors' Contributions Statement:

Suciatis Alawiyah developed the research concept, collected data, analyzed the data, and wrote the initial draft of the manuscript.

## Conflict of Interest:

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest in this study.

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